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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Bald Eagles Lay First Egg in 50 Years on the Northern Channel Islands

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CA – Today, biologists announced that for the first time in more than 50 years, a pair of bald eagles has laid an egg in a nest on Santa Cruz Island off the coast of Southern California. The last known successful nesting of a bald eagle on the Northern Channel Islands was in 1949 on Anacapa Island.

Bald eagles disappeared from the Channel Islands by the early 1960s, due to human impacts, primarily pollution. Millions of pounds of DDTs and PCBs released into the ocean off the Palos Verdes Peninsula between the 1940s and the 1970s continue to contaminate the regional food web. The effects of these chemicals are magnified in the food chain, causing bald eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that either dehydrate or break in the nest.

Since 2002, biologists from the Institute for Wildlife Studies (IWS) have been re-establishing young bald eagles on the northern Channel Islands as a part of the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program. The hope is that these birds may fare better than the bald eagles farther south on Catalina Island, which continue to produce fragile eggs.

The breeding bald eagles on Santa Cruz Island were both hatched from a captive breeding program at the San Francisco Zoo and were fostered into nests on Catalina Island in 2001 and 2002. After leaving Catalina Island, they each roamed the western U.S. mainland and visited the northern Channel Islands, possibly attracted by the presence of other young eagles there. The 5-year-old male and 4-year-old female established a territory on Santa Cruz Island in late 2005.

Although inexperienced pairs can be unsuccessful on their first breeding attempt, the biologists involved remain cautiously optimistic about the prospects of a chick hatching in the next few weeks.

“We are keeping our fingers crossed, as this is the first breeding attempt for the pair,” states David Garcelon, president of the IWS. “Regardless of the outcome, we will continue to intensely monitor this and other bald eagle pairs in the Channel Islands over the coming years to assess their overall reproductive success.”

“This is very exciting news,” said Russell Galipeau, Superintendent, Channel Islands National Park. “To have breeding bald eagles again on the Northern Channel Islands represents a significant milestone in bald eagle recovery efforts.”

The National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy, co-owners of Santa Cruz Island, want to remind visitors that bald eagles are a federally protected species and that it is illegal to disturb nesting birds. Disturbances can cause the eagles to accidentally break the egg or fly away from the nest, leaving the egg vulnerable to ravens or other predators.

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This bald eagle re-establishment study is part the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP), a multi-agency program dedicated to restoring natural resources harmed by DDTs and PCBs released into the environment by Montrose Chemical Corporation and other industrial sources in Southern California in the mid 20th century. MSRP is overseen by representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, California Department of Fish and Game, California State Lands Commission, and California Department of Parks and Recreation.

Further information on the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program can be found at: www.montroserestoration.gov.